



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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Burmaster budget request includes STEM initiative

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's 2009-2011 education budget request includes funding for a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiative that will reinforce Wisconsin's competitiveness in the knowledge economy.

"Education is the engine for long-term economic growth," Burmaster said. "For Wisconsin students to be world ready, investment in STEM must be a priority."

Currently, Wisconsin's STEM grant program provides \$61,500 annually to help districts develop instructional programs in the STEM subject areas. The Department of Public Instruction awarded 27 grants ranging from \$1,660 to \$5,000 over the 2007-09 biennium, but received requests for double the appropriation. Burmaster's budget seeks a funding increase to \$1 million, beginning in 2011, to offer grants that would average from \$20,000 to \$25,000.

"Larger grants would encourage districts to make transformational change and impact a broad cross-section of students, including those under-represented in STEM careers," Burmaster said. "We want districts to develop innovative, engaging programs such as new science or mathematics equivalency courses, integration and connection of STEM coursework to STEM careers, and work-based learning opportunities in STEM-related business and industry to fortify our competitiveness in the global economy."

Burmaster's budget also calls for a STEM Stewardship Fund that would help fund remodeling of Wisconsin middle and high school classrooms and laboratories to accommodate state-of-the-art STEM instruction and programs. The fund would provide \$5 million in state-supported bonding revenue in the 2011 fiscal year. Teachers in districts receiving STEM stewardship grants would be required to attend professional development activities available through new regional STEM academies.

The budget seeks funding for regional STEM academies to meet a comprehensive plan for excellence in STEM education that responds to labor trends and workforce needs. Academy staff would

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develop and provide professional development on STEM curricular models and specific unit plans. Additionally, the academies would provide STEM content, courses, and experiences for high school junior and senior students. Finally, the academies would provide co-teaching experiences, mentoring, and an in-depth summer institute to offer professional development to any interested school. Funding for the academies over the two-year budget would be \$1.4 million and become a fiscal partnership between businesses and the state.

“These academies will link with the governor’s Grow Wisconsin agenda and place emphasis on current economic development areas that include health care; agribusiness, forestry, and biotechnology; renewable energy; and advanced manufacturing,” Burmaster said. “For our students, these academies will focus on distance learning opportunities and innovative approaches like work-based and service learning that provide hands-on experience in STEM fields.”

To support recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in high poverty schools in critical shortage subject areas, including STEM fields, the state superintendent’s budget supports two loan programs for the Higher Education Aids Board. The budget seeks \$500,000 in 2011 to create a new High Need Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program. Students could have their college loan forgiven if they teach in a school district in which at least 40 percent of pupils are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Additionally, the teachers must be licensed and teach mathematics, science, or technology education at the middle or high school level or teach English as a second language, bilingual education, special education, or world languages at any grade level.

Burmaster’s budget also supports an increase of \$237,900 each year of the biennium for the board’s existing Minority Teacher Loan Program. The appropriation would increase the annual loans to \$5,000 per year with a \$10,000 maximum.

“The quality of the teacher in the classroom is one of the most important factors in students’ educational success,” Burmaster said. “To prepare for the increasing number of Wisconsin teachers who are reaching retirement age and the critical shortage in some subject areas, we must attract and retain a diverse, high-quality teaching force. Loan forgiveness programs can help us in this important effort.”

Last school year, 119 Wisconsin public schools participated in Project Lead the Way high school programs in pre-engineering. The annual \$250,000 budget appropriation that supports teacher professional development or software leasing, which is essential to district participation, will sunset in June 2009. Burmaster’s budget would continue Project Lead the Way funding in the next biennium.

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